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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 004548

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: SYRIAN DEPUTY FM MOALLEM VISIT TO UAE

REF: A. ABU DHABI 3272

- [1](#)B. ABU DHABI 3700
- [1](#)C. ABU DHABI 4540
- [1](#)D. ABU DHABI 3801
- [1](#)E. ABU DHABI 3615

Classified By: DCM Martin R. Quinn for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Walid Moallem visited Abu Dhabi October 31 for meetings with President Khalifa and Information Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Sheikh Abdullah told Ambassador that Moallem "had nothing new to offer" and that he had declined the invitation to visit Damascus again. Private comment by UAEG senior leaders, as distinct from UAE media, may indicate a cooling in the UAE-Syria relationship. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Walid Moallem visited Abu Dhabi October 31 to seek UAEG support for the embattled Syrian regime. Moallem met one-on-one with President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan to seek UAE support for Damascus as it faces further scrutiny over its role in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri. Moallem assured Khalifa of Syria's willingness to cooperate with the Mehlis inquiry into Hariri's assassination, while underscoring the dangers of destabilizing Syria. Moallem told the press that he was upset that the United Nations Security Council had adopted Resolution 1636 on October 31, saying that "It is an unhappy time for me and for my country."

UAE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TURNS MORE NEGATIVE ON SYRIA

[1](#)3. (C) The UAE leadership has refrained from criticizing President Bashar al-Asad publicly in the past, preferring

quieter consultations with other Arab League states and directly with Damascus. UAE Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan (AbZ) visited Asad in Damascus July 31 (ref A, B) and told Ambassador November 6 that he also met one-on-one with Walid Moallem, who "had nothing new to offer." AbZ said that Moallem invited him to return to Damascus and that he responded firmly in the negative.

UAE PRESS COVERAGE OF SYRIA

¶4. (U) Syria is learning to play the PR game, with local press carrying extensive statements by Syria's Ambassador to the UAE, Riyadh Nassan Agha. Agha said that Syria was explaining to the leaders of other Arab countries that any conflict in the region is not in the interest of Syria, Arabs, and the Muslim nations. He thanked the UAE and other GCC states for their support for Syria and said the situation was "very critical and we need the support of all Arabs." Agha further said that the UN resolution's reference to Chapter 7, which allows the use of force, was "horrible" and "illogical." The UNSC is "talking about the use of force while the investigation into Hariri's death has not finished yet." Agha said that Syria has decided to cooperate with the UN and the international community "to prove its innocence in the assassination" of Hariri. He emphasized Syria's desire to cooperate with the Mehlis Committee and said that the Syrian President has ordered the creation of a special legal committee to help Mehlis and the international commission investigate the assassination. Agha also underscored the dangers of destabilizing Syria. The Arab media and others should know that "whatever affects Syria will not harm us alone, but the entire Arab region will plunge into chaos."

¶5. (U) Just prior to Moallem's visit, semi-official Arabic daily Al-Ittihad (October 30) lauded the Syrian decision to form a special committee to investigate Hariri's murder, editorializing that since the Syrian president gave the investigating committee authority to question both civilians and military, the gesture "reflects Syria's real desire to get to the truth." The editorial further expressed concern that extreme pressure on Syria (like that directed against Iraq) will add to regional tension and instability, spawning a new crisis.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: If Syria was looking for a public statement of support from the UAEG as a result of the Moallem visit, it is probably not going to get it. Over the past few weeks we have detected a cooling in the UAE-Syria relationship, at least at the senior leadership level. There have been some recent signs. During October 11 telcon with NEA A/S David Welch, AbZ enthused that it was time for Bashar "to feel the heat." Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) told us (during October 18 visit of Ambassador Khalilzad) that the Syrian president was untrustworthy and had the "same mentality as the old guard" in Syria. MbZ also opined that "Syria is a country that needs a major change" (ref C). However, the next level down of MFA officials, non-decision-makers like U/S Abdullah Rashid Al Noaimi and one former UAE ambassador to Damascus (Asst U/S Tariq Al Haidan) have tended toward a softer approach (ref D, E), more aligned with local media and popular opinion. END COMMENT.

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